

Charlie Burns:

Owner Barry van Gerbig had promised him a job in the Seals organization for as long he wished. He could have taken the easy way, becoming a coach with one of their minor teams. But his burning ambition had always been to play a full shift in the NHL, not the penalty-killing role he had been relegated to in his previous big league stints with Detroit and Boston. So he reported to the Oakland camp last fall to try out for the squad. The rest is history, as ...

HIS HUSTLE SEALED THE BARGAIN

By **JOE WUJEK**

CHARLIE BURNS, former captain and coach of the Western League Seals, has made the grade as a regular on the NHL Oakland ditto. The fact that Charlie is skating regular shifts comes as no surprise to Seals followers who have watched the hustling forward perform in a Seals sweater since the fall of 1963.

There was, however, a period after the 1966-67 season and before the present campaign when Charlie's future was somewhat uncertain. Burns had done a creditable job as Seals player-coach, putting a thinly-manned team into the playoffs in April '67. Charlie, while carrying the burden of coaching, nevertheless enjoyed a 60 point season on 22 goals and 38 assists.

The previous season, hampered by a back problem which required midseason surgery, Charlie had a 45 point record (10G, 35A). Some measure of the man is obtained by recognizing that Charlie had a spinal disc removed by the noted surgeon, Dr. Norman Chater, and only 41 days after the operation was back in league competition! Charlie credits Dr. Chater with this remarkable recovery, but those who know Burns will say that Charlie's competitive spirit figured very prominently as well.

With this kind of performance to his credit it was not surprising that the Seals management and fans cooperated in sponsoring "Charlie Burns Night" the



evening of the last regular season game in spring '67. Charlie received many gifts from management and friends, and as Seals owner Barry van Gerbig stood next to Burns, and thanked him for his inspired leadership, he promised Charlie a job in the Seals organization as long as he wished to remain. The thundering ovation of the crowd to van Gerbig's pledge was a vote of approval.

Against this background then, Charlie weighed several possibilities in the summer of '67. He could remain in the Seals organization as a coach or player in the minors, or possibly in a front-office job. Then too, former Seals-GM-Coach Norman "Bud" Poile, now GM at Philadelphia, made overtures to Burns to join his new Flyers organization. After some careful thinking and numerous conferences with the people involved, Charlie decided to report to the Seals' Port Huron, Michigan, camp and try out for the squad.

Burns was given no preferential treatment in camp, he had to dig like others on the squad. In the early going Burns was working on a fifth forward line, but by his aggressive play and hustle, work-

ed his way into one of the top three lines. When the club broke camp and came west for their NHL season opener, the name of Charles Frederick Burns was on the team roster.

Adversity is not new in the life of Burns. A bad spill into the boards while playing for the Toronto Marlboros in 1954 almost ended his career, indeed almost ended his life. A blood clot and concussion resulted from the accident, and Charlie admits with a smile that "I was knocking on the pearly gates." Several operations and a year and a half later, Charlie was again skating, this time for the Whitby Dunlops in Senior hockey.

In 1958 Burns played in 70 games for Detroit Red Wings, almost exclusively as a penalty-killer. In June '59 the Boston Bruins drafted him, and except for an eight-game turn with Kingston in the old EPHL, he played with Boston from the start of the 1959-60 season until the season end in 1963, again, chiefly as a penalty-killer. Bruins had a working agreement with the WHL Seals so Charlie found himself with the Seals in October.

Disappointed at being sent down from the NHL, Charlie never let it show in his ice performances and quickly became a fan favorite. The white-helmeted Burns, then as now a tenacious fore-checker and skilful playmaker, hustled his way through four fine seasons and two Lester Patrick Cup championships. So it was that Burns found himself back in the NHL after a four-year absence from the big league.

Looking back over his career, Charlie credits Marlie coach "Turk" Broda for helping him along in the early days. Broda has coached many players now in the NHL, and among Burns' teammates on the Toronto junior team were Seals teammates Bob Baun and Wally Boyer. Former Leaf Carl Brewer was on that Marlboro squad, as was Bob Pulford, Bob Nevin, and Al MacNeil — quite a collection of talent! Once in the NHL, Marcel Pronovost, then at Detroit, gave Burns some pointers while Charlie was a Red Wing. At Boston, Leo Boivin taught Charlie a few things, too. But in an opinion shared by many, Burns thinks "Gordie Howe is the greatest, no doubt about it. He made me feel at home."

In the early going this season, the Seals were having their problems. But



"... And I've always been a real fan of yours!"

throughout an early season 15-game drought, the Seals kept hustling. Looking bad in only 3 of the 15 games, the Seals skated with their opponents in the remaining 12, emerging with ties against Chicago, Los Angeles, and Pittsburgh. As for the problems which confronted Seals in the first month of this season, Charlie feels "When we made a mistake, the puck went in the net. When you're in a slump these things do happen. When you're going well and you make a mistake, someone is there to help you out."

The Seals were not drawing well at the gate, and while Burns made no excuses for the team's losing performances at home, he concedes that a full-house crowd can have a psychological effect on a hockey club.

"There's no question about it, everybody likes to play in front of a crowd. Maybe we all want to show off, or whatever it may be, but they give you that spark. Those are his fans, and he wants them to think he's the best."

Burns, born in Detroit, lived in Toronto from pre-school age and started his career in church leagues in the Toronto area. He feels that NHL expansion, in creating more player needs, may open the door for more U.S. players.

"I would have to think that expansion will give the young player a little more inspiration. A player can be given the opportunity to go on and play professional hockey. But in U.S. when a player reaches 15 or so, there isn't any place to go. However, the new clubs will build farm systems, and give young players a crack at it. The Seals are trying to help out."

Charlie resides in Alameda, close by the Seals rink, with his wife Carol and four-year-old daughter Karyn. Carol is a hockey fan, and goes to the games, but Charlie grins and says, "She gets a little upset when things aren't going well for us."

When his playing days are over, Burns would like to remain in hockey in some capacity or another. With some coaching experience already behind him, one would think his chances are good to some day take his place as a coach. Charlie's playing and coaching philosophy is perhaps best summed up in his own words, "All you have to do is work." Not bad advice for any line of worthwhile activity, and he knows how!

PICTO-QUIZ

How's your All-Star knowledge? Can you name these members of former All-Star Teams, and tell us which have never yet been selected to the first team — but have made the second squad? You may be in for some surprises!



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